

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021

Daniel 7: 1-28 (A prophetic panorama)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Kemi Ogundipe

Hello, and welcome to our service. My name is Ian and today we will be thinking about Daniel's dream of the four beasts. Our bible reading is from Daniel 7v1-28

Let me pray as we start.

Lord thank you that we can meet as your people and to take this time to focus on you. Help us to set aside all the business and worries of the week so we might listen to you and learn more about your love for us. Amen.

Now Kemi will lead us in our intercessions then I will read from the bible.

### **Intercessions**

Let us pray to our heavenly father.

Praise be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are his and he changes the time and seasons, he removes the kings and set up kings, he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding, he reveals the deep and secrets things, he knows what is in the darkness and light dwells with him.

Lord in these few moments of stillness we bring before you our prayer.

We live in a sinful world, and we have fallen short in one way or the other, despite our sinfulness, you forgive and forget thanking you for offering yourself to us as a tender and compassionate father, though we cannot hold on to you physically, but we can receive your love in our hearts by the holy Spirit.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, keep us under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress, knowing that nothing can separate us from your Love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Creator God we pray for our world and its people with all their needs, questions and longings, we struggle to understand the reasons behind things like coronavirus and yet know that during this, your love is shown in the acts of selflessness and compassion that follow. we pray for all who suffer in such circumstances and for those who provide medical and community support and the long task of recovery that will follow this devastating pandemic.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Everlasting God, we pray for the worldwide Christian church and its diversity, for churches who meet in difficult and dangerous circumstances and at this time of the pandemic, for all those

churches that cannot meet in person but only online and zoom virtual worship, may they feel your presence to uphold their courage and strengthen their faith.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Father God, we pray for our church that each of us might make use of our individual talents to help our church to flourish as a witness to the "One body" of the church, help us to spread the warmth of your love to everyone we meet whether in person or zoom virtual worship.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

God the provider, we pray for people in our community and wider community, who are facing unemployment or money worries at this time, especially for those who are unable to afford enough to eat and that foodbanks would receive sufficient food donations and they would be able to respond to every person who needs their support with sensitivity kindness, we ask for your blessings on those who donate and distribute the food.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for those in need in our church and our community, the sick, and dying, the elderly, lonely or uncertain, for people who need healing, for all finding life painful, ill and vulnerable, we ask for comfort for Keith and Barbara, Antony, Audrey, Alison sister, healing for Lorraine, Zak, Karim's Dad, Will, Alison sister-in-law, Val, we pray for those in care homes, hospitals, and hospices and for all the work of those who care for them. We thank you for carers love and compassion for both equipment and Spiritual comfort.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, help us to see this time of lent as an opportunity to develop our discipleship and discipline as your son Jesus showed us how to avoid temptation, fill us with grace to be faithful to his example in this Lenten season and always.

Lord in your mercy/**Hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, in this new week, may we reflect your love in our families and community so that the world can see that we are followers of Christ and Children of the highest God and draw others into his loving care.

Merciful father - **Accept these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour Jesus Christ.**

In unity we say together the prayer our saviour Jesus Christ taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,**

**Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and glory are yours**

**Now and for ever.**

**Amen.**

## Reading - Daniel 7v1-28

**1** In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.

**2** Daniel said: 'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. **3** Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

**4** 'The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.

**5** 'And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, "Get up and eat your fill of flesh!"

**6** 'After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

**7** 'After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast – terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

**8** 'While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

**9** 'As I looked,

'thrones were set in place,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.

His clothing was as white as snow;  
the hair of his head was white like wool.

His throne was flaming with fire,  
and its wheels were all ablaze.

**10** A river of fire was flowing,  
coming out from before him.

Thousands upon thousands attended him;  
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

The court was seated,  
and the books were opened.

**11** 'Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. **12** (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

**13** 'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. **14** He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

**15** 'I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. **16** I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. 'So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: **17** "The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth. **18** But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it for ever – yes, for ever and ever."

**19** 'Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws – the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. **20** I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell – the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. **21** As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, **22** until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

**23** 'He gave me this explanation: "The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. **24** The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. **25** He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.

**26** "But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed for ever. **27** Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him."

**28** 'This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself.'

### **Talk - A prophetic panorama**

One year when I was on holiday in France we went to a town called Domme. It is high up and has many interesting buildings and a busy market. We visited the town not knowing the language or customs and it was very hot and slowly we went through the bustling market until we came to the end of the stalls and bang. To our surprise there was a large terrace with a view. Now I could have looked down on the river and seen the man in his canoe and noted the colour of his shirt and the life jacket as well as the kind of paddle and type of storage he had. All very interesting especially if you are into water sport. But that would have missed the point. You see we had been led there deliberately so that we could see the whole panoramic view stretching miles before us. There lay the vast plain with the Dordogne river snaking its way past and all the trees and fields and distant towns laid out as a treat to our eyes. It was so important that we took in the big picture rather than focus on the small details.

That is what chapter 7 of Daniel gives us. There is much detail that is not explained but the end goal of Gods judgement is explained. We are shown the bigger picture.

Chapter 7 marks a change in the book of Daniel in that the dreams and visions are now Daniels rather than the kings. They are complex and strange and open to much interpretation.

We know from previous chapters that this dream is at the start of Belshazzars time. It was a time of change and a very different kingdom to the one Nebuchadnezzar ruled. It was different in style and morals. Daniels place in the court was less central, many of those he knew in positions of power had changed, and whilst Nebuchadnezzar had acknowledged God Belshazzar would not. Now Babylon we know was about to come to a swift and tragic end.

All this was happening around Daniel and it troubled him and the events and politics conflicted him as evil came to the fore and he begins to have these strange dreams and visions.

The vision in ch7 is very different to the statue and tree images of chapters 2&4. Instead they are four filthy, cruel beasts that come out of the chaos of the raging sea. They have an insatiable thirst for cruelty with a desire to fight and prey on their predecessor. They seem to become worse; each one being more cruel and more proud.

Maybe the beast in Daniel ch7, which is similar to the one described in Revelation ch13, is signifying an inevitable consequence of corrupt governments because governments are run by sinful people. Politics has always been a mixed bag of noble aspirations, compromise and dirty dealing but does it have to be that way?

We need some form of government to run our countries and we certainly need Christians to serve in them and Romans ch13 Paul encourages us to submit to those who have God given authority over us.

Jesus said in Matt ch5v13-14 we are to be salt and light to society ensuring justice, truth and humanity are promoted so as to keep society on the right track. Darkness and corruption have to be resisted or they will take over.

Interestingly the vision about the four beasts and the son of man is described but not explained. It is only later in v15 that a person standing there answers Daniels question. Not about the whole vision but the part Daniel is curious about.

Actually the point is about the evil and where it came from and where it is going.

At that time there were myths about the origins of things before the creation of the world. These said the creator had to conquer and subdue the wild sea and its monsters. They had to be contained unless they escape to cause chaos in the world, lawlessness and havoc. Babylonians and others had a myth that there was continual conflict in rounding up and capturing the beasts. They had festivals to celebrate their capture and religious rituals to help their gods against the beasts.

The Babylonian view is very grim because it means the very makeup of the universe is that there are two equal and opposite forces of good and evil who are locked in an eternal cosmic struggle with no resolution no victory and no end. How terrible is that. It means that all that is good and pure will be forever under threat and that there will never ever be peace and reconciliation. A violent world without hope.

But this is not a biblical view. The bible teaches a very different truth. The gospel of John ch1 states

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made

that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

In the beginning was God who is goodness and love and light and the word was Jesus. There were no monsters. Daniel would have known about these myths and stories and having lived in the centre of Babylonian culture he must have been challenged in his thinking and it must have been a struggle to keep focused on God.

We are no different as we are daily bombarded with opinions and views which are contrary to biblical teaching. Perhaps such a shocking vision or dream would bring our minds back to focusing on God. Maybe this is the role of such passages in the bible. A reminder for us not to lose sight of all the wonderful things God has done because our current difficulties.

The end of the vision shows that the son of man will come in clouds down from heaven as opposed to the beasts who rise up from the wild chaotic sea. In Matt ch24v30 Jesus states he will return in this way and He will assert his authority and his kingdom will never be destroyed and will never end. So v13 shows this and it is a vision pointing us to Christ's second coming. For this is the judgement of the Ancient of days a wise, respected and venerable judge which we can see is the God of creation and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It can be hard for us to accept these visions and to keep faith in Jesus return when we see so much evil and suffering around us. Cruel and harsh regimes are in power and Christians are persecuted all over the world.

However we need to hold onto the fact that this passage tells us in v13&14 that "one like the son of man" will be given the kingdom and also in v18 & 27 the kingdom is given to the saints or the pious ones of Israel that is God's people. We see in revelation that the saints in heaven are the people of God who are in Christ Jesus and profess his name.

Perhaps the image of the vine is useful here to explain the phrase in Christ Jesus because Jesus said in John ch15v1 "I am the true vine and you are the branches". Yet the vine is everything - root, stem, branch and fruit. So we are in Christ as the branch is in the vine. We are Christians because of Jesus and we can be in God's kingdom because of Jesus.

Likewise when Saul (later called Paul) persecuted Christians Jesus did not say on the Damascus road "why do you persecute my church" he actually said "why do you persecute me" This shows Jesus identifies himself with the church, with us. It is the idea that we are all one in Christ Jesus which is comforting and challenging at the same time. Comforting that we have an eternal hope, unlike the Babylonians, and challenging in that we have a responsibility to live under God's laws and to tell others about God's plan in Jesus.

But to be in Christ we have to grasp some difficult concepts. Importantly we have to grasp that when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, that is all the wrongdoings that we do, we died to ourself. Then when Jesus rose from the dead we too rose to a new life free from sin and its power of evil and death. So we are free now not just in the future.

In v17 the four beasts are four kingdoms the noblest is probably Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon followed by the Median, Persian and Greek kingdoms. They are typical of the kind of kingdoms and empires that have existed since Daniel's dream. Nothing much is said about the early kingdoms and Daniel only asks about the fourth beast. This kingdom will have a series of kings but the last will be

treacherous one who speaks against God and oppresses his people for a season and will prevail against them for a time.

As we saw earlier the God of creation will judge the beast and hand the kingdom to Jesus. Daniel did not get bogged down with small details but saw the big picture the full panoramic view as it were. Daniel sees from the here and now through to the end of time when the son of man returns to complete his kingdom on earth.

So should we look to our situation and state of the world to try and see where we are with these beasts and the second coming?

I certainly had a church member in the 1990's try to convince me that the EU, or EEC as it was called then, was the beast that would rule the world. Such ideas will always come and go. However, world movements in themselves are not bad as long as the aims are good and the personal freedoms are maintained. We should not be afraid to resist bad ideas or the curtailment of people's rights to choose. We should guard against the perversion of the truth of the gospel or control of freedom of speech.

Daniel started and finished this passage troubled by his dream. We must not be surprised if studying God's word and following him sometimes challenges us or troubles our thoughts. To understand some of the ideas in the bible is not easy but we have the Holy Spirit to help us.

Daniel's vision reminds us that evil still persists in this world and we should always be aware of the damage done by it. However we can still fight against it, by prayer and action, remembering that Christ has overcome evil and it is on its way to total destruction but like a wounded animal it is very dangerous.

So where does that leave us?

Well, we must be on our guard so as not to become like the world and let our ambition and drive for success point us towards the beasts and away from God. We must ensure that the church family functions in a godly way so that we do not destroy ourselves. We must be on our guard for we are still involved in a spiritual war.

To bring this full circle I want to come back to my holiday visit to Domme. I said that we had been led there. Well we were on holiday with Sue and Steve who had been there before but wanted us to see for ourselves and be surprised by the view. They gained enjoyment from our delight and were glad that we loved the view as much as they did.

I want to use that as an example of how we too can enjoy showing people the full expanse of what God has done for us in Jesus. When others see a panoramic view of the bible from creation to eternal life with Christ. When they take in the truth and understand who Jesus is, then what joy will fill our hearts.

Daniel was troubled with the explanation, because he did not know what Jesus Christ would achieve on the cross, and so he kept the explanation to himself. We are the beneficiaries of Jesus sacrifice and that hope in the final resurrection gives us a joy and a focus for our lives, even in this current time of Covid-19. When the short view seems that evil is in charge we know the complete view shows God is victorious. For we have a hope now and the promise of an eternal life in Christ. We have been blessed with a panoramic view of God's plan and we must share it.

Amen

A closing prayer from Romans 15v13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy spirit.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

Amen

Thank you for reading this and may God bless you this coming week